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WASHINGTON-Felice D. Gaer, chair of the independent, federal, bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), will testify Thursday, July 27, at 1:00 p.m. in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 562, at a hearing of the U.S. Helsinki Commission entitled "Human Rights and U.S.-Russian Relations: Implications for the Future." Commissioner Gaer will describe USCIRF's latest findings on the state of religious freedom and human rights in Russia following a USCIRF delegation visit to Russia last month.

Following the visit of its delegation to Russia, USCIRF expressed particular concern about the following areas:

- The rise in xenophobia and ethnic and religious intolerance in Russia, resulting in increasing violent attacks and other hate crimes, and the government's failure to address this serious problem adequately.
- The Russian government's challenging of international human rights institutions and its persistent claim that foreign funding of Russian human rights organizations constitutes illegitimate interference in Russia's internal affairs.
- Official actions related to countering terrorism that have resulted in harassment of individual Muslims and Muslim communities.
- New amendments to the law on non-commercial organizations (i.e., NGOs, which includes religious organizations) that may be used to restrict severely their ability to function.
- Continuing restrictions by the Russian authorities on the exercise of freedom of religion or belief, particularly at the regional and local levels.

The full text of Commissioner Gaer's testimony will be available immediately following the hearing on the Commission's web site at www.uscifr.gov .

Commissioner Gaer is Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Felice D. Gaer ,
- Michael Cromartie ,